

SOME MEMORIALS

OF

ROBERT BEIGHET:

A Native of Redesdale,

NORTHUMBERLAND.

FROM MR. ROBERT WHITE'S MANUSCRIPTS.

---

Man deserves praise and ought to be remembered, not because he is or has been the favourite of Fortune, or that Plenty has poured out the contents of her horn at his feet ; but rather, if during his progress through the world, whether his lot may have been that of luxuriant wealth or pinching poverty, he has amid temptation or trial, adulation or reproach, ever kept in view the exalted end of his being, and remained true to his principles, his conscience, and his God. *MS.*

---

NEWCASTLE:

M. A. RICHARDSON, 44, GREY STREET.

MDCCCXLII.



SOME MEMORIALS OF  
ROBERT BEIGHET :

&c.



T may truly be said that the scythe of Time is in no instance employed more effectually than in clearing away all material which may be appropriated to the biography of a man whose years are spent amongst the middle and lower orders of society. On his decease he leaves behind him no record by which we may obtain information as to his habits, his disposition, or the most material incidents of his life. If he was in the habit of cor-

responding with one or two intimate friends, it rarely happens that his letters are preserved. Not considering them of any importance beyond the present moment, those individuals to whom they were addressed generally place them in some corner to which others have access as well as themselves; and thus, in the course of time, they gradually disappear. Such amongst them as may have been written on the spur of some stirring occasion, and which may contain matter that is truly valuable, are, on that account, often carried in the pocket of the receiver, and read to his acquaintances until they are worn to tatters and destroyed. Even when it occurs that a number of these documents have, by one individual, been duly appreciated and preserved, the collection, after his death, almost always descends into the hands of those who "care nothing about these things" and who disperse it, never again to be gathered together. Moreover, people in a common station of life rarely possess means for the safe keeping of letters: their drawers and chests are frequently so filled with wearing apparel and other articles of a like nature that no room is left for these silent yet impressive memorials of friendship. The result, therefore, is that when any enquiry may be afterwards



made into the views or character of a man thus bounded by circumstances, the absence of all diaries or registers of his thoughts or actions, and the want of any connection with literary affairs occasion blanks in the story of his existence which cannot possibly be filled up. This is the more to be regretted when it is applicable to those who have passed their lives in obscurity, and whose homely virtues and adherence to moral uprightness justly entitle them to some share of respectful remembrance.

Robert Beighet was born at Otterburne some time about the year 1757. His father, who would appear to have been a fuller and dyer, rented the Walk Mill at that place. It is probable that a portion of land would be attached to the mill, for Robert in his early years was accustomed to reap, mow and perform such work as is usually required about a small farm. He also, occasionally, assisted his father in the business of the mill ; and being a ready, active lad, we may conclude he soon attained great proficiency in that department, for he was ever considered to be an excellent workman. Moreover, he excelled in all sports which required address or agility ; yet, even then, he was influenced by such delicacy as never to appear, in these or other amusements, a principal leading man. He joined the revelry more from being himself pleased with it, and affording, in that case, pleasure to others, than from any ambition of appearing, like Billy Oliver in local song, “ a clever chep ” amongst his companions. Possessing an excellent musical ear, he loved dancing ; and his progress at the first school he ever attended, where skill in that agreeable pastime was taught and acquired, may be inferred from the following anecdote, which he himself, with infinite humour, was accustomed to relate.

Being, at a time, in want of some oats for his horse, he went to the Woodhill, a farm steading about half a mile distant from Otterburne, and purchased the quantity required. The occupier of the place was a man advanced in years—but a hale, hearty, joyous blade, who had himself, in his younger days, footed many an excellent measure on the barn floors in the neighbourhood. He knew that Robert was receiving instructions in dancing, and, when the corn was sacked up, he proposed that the lad should trip over a step or two, and he agreed to whistle the tune. Accordingly, to work the couple went, and the performance pleased the old fellow so mightily that at the close he cried out “ Wuns, Bob ! if I had a son, sic a dancer as thou, dye, if a wud ca’ the *King my cousin* ! ”

When matters of business called him from home, he had frequently an opportunity, on riding out around the country, to procure and lay up in his memory much of that local and traditionary story, which only awaited the will of its possessor to well forth in profusion ;

and for which he continued to be distinguished through life. Besides, his field of observation was of the most choice description, for Redesdale in these days contained more originality of character than, probably, could be found in any other equally sized district in England. Having little intercourse with each other, and almost none with people who were more actively employed in other divisions of the country, a large number of its inhabitants occupied and farmed their own patches of land, which enabled them to live in a state of rude independence: thus, they contracted habits and opinions very different indeed from those which prevailed in more stirring and fashionable places.

It was at this period, and even of late years, customary for those connected with Otterburne Mill to attend at Bellingham every Saturday, to deliver and receive orders, and, in this department Robert was very generally employed. Besides, to those who had any letter or parcel to send to or from either place, he formed a medium of communication; and, by his readiness to oblige, he sometimes had as much or more trouble with other people's matters than his own. Indeed he often incurred blame if he was not so scrupulously exact in performing his commissions as the parties desired. We may mention, as an instance, that the wife of a farmer, who resided at Hatherwick, only a short distance from Otterburne, once brought him a quantity of garden mint, wrapped up in an old, blue, rent apron. She told him to take it to Bellingham, to a person who distilled mint water; and gave him at the same time strict charge to bring back the envelope. The first part of her orders he faithfully executed, but neglected the last; and three days afterwards he had a visit from the dame for the decayed fragment belonging to her wardrobe. Knowing it was of no avail to patch up an apology, he admitted at once that he had forgot the article; but added that from its ragged appearance, he considered it scarcely worth carrying home. "Say'st tu sey, lad?" replied the matron; "an' dis tu think that ma apron's to be lost, thou durty thing, thou, for thy carelessness? Egad! but A'se neyther eat or drink till A get it!" With this resolution she departed,—crossed Reedwater,—continued her way over Hareshaw moors to Bellingham, a distance of nearly six miles, and recovered the old apron. Tidings of her journey for such a trifle, reached home before she returned, and her daughter, who felt desirous to stand a little more favourably in public estimation, exclaimed "Gude gracious, sic a thing! She'll shame us a'!"

Here, we are enabled to perceive the opportunities that Robert Beighet enjoyed, during a period of the greatest importance to a young man; for then his character receives the "form and pressure"



it retains through after life. That he was a close observer, none who had any knowledge of him could, for a moment deny ; and, amidst the profusion of material which lay around him, he exercised both taste and judgment in appropriating such portions of it as were exclusively adapted to his own purpose. Not a single glimpse into old customs—not a trait of peculiar character—not even an allusion to an individual who was no more, but, as it came from his lips, bore so striking an illustration of human life and nature, that it told home with his listeners, and made them feel they gave ear to the words of no ordinary man. His experience in life, also furnished him with many examples of man and woman's strangeness ; and having a remarkably quick eye for the ludicrous, and no small share of humour, he never failed when opportunity served in turning these talents to account.

During that part of the year when least work was done at the Ful-ling Mill, and his assistance was not especially required out of doors, he quitted Redesdale, sought for employment in other places, and earned wages by the performance of such agricultural or other labour, as he could readily procure. He was one of the number of those who excavated, and formed the pond or reservoir, which stretches eastward from Woosington Bridge, on the main road from Newcastle to Ponteland. When the undertaking was completed, as English hospitality was at that time more practised than now, the men went to the Hall, and were plentifully regaled with bread, cheese, and ale. Robert recollected the *treat* perfectly, and often spoke in commendatory terms of the wisdom displayed by the butler, who was a Frenchman, in the distribution of the malt liquor. The men were peaceable at first, but as the beverage began to operate, it was supplied more sparingly until at length, they openly, and not in a very becoming manner, asked for more. He of office now came forward and pointed out the inconsistency of the demand in something like the following words. “De ale is not yours—you have no right to it. It vas given you, ven you behave properly ; and now, ven you do not, you can have no more. Each of you now be able to go home on his own legs : if more ale vas given, he must be carried, or lie out all de night, and get death by de cold. Oh ! no ! no ! you can have no more !”

About this period of Robert's life, it fell out that a young female, who lived in the immediate vicinity of Otterburne, possessed such attractions as to awaken in his bosom the thrilling yet indefinable sensations of love. To a man of his susceptible temperament, nothing was more likely to happen ; but the delicate way, probably, in which these impressions were made known to the goddess who inspired them, would not be of that kind most calculated to arrest her

attention ; and it followed of course that his suit was unsuccessful. Women are supposed to be quick in perceiving what is praiseworthy in those of the opposite sex, and some wonder has occasionally arisen how men, of first rate ability, have, in the matter of obtaining a lady's favour, been surpassed by others who never even conceived an idea beyond the range of the most common intellect. But we ought to consider that though acuteness of perception be one of the distinguishing qualities of the female character, all are not endowed with sagacity sufficient to judge correctly of sterling worth ; that the eye and pride of woman both seek to be gratified ; that she naturally shrinks from what she cannot readily comprehend ; and that a well disposed man, modest perhaps from the profound respect he may entertain towards her, or one whose refinement of mind is much in advance to that of her own, has the least chance of all to succeed in her good graces. In addition to this, we know that a young damsel will obey the dictates of the heart rather than the head ; and, if her affections have previously found a resting place on another object, whoever will attempt to re-win them, may find it a task of no small difficulty. Robert, however, was unable to engage the hopes and fears of her to whom his heart yielded homage, and it has been said that he found a rival in one of his own friends. Be that as it may, the following stanzas, which he loved to sing, and accompany with exquisite music, were either written by himself, or prized by him as a memorial of his own feelings on this occasion.

### Song.

Oh, how vexed am I now when I think on't !

When first I gaed out to the plain,  
An' tented the shearers wi Peggy,  
I binded the bundles o' grain.

*Oh, how vexed &c.*

Oh, could I call back the sweet moments,

When Peggy allowed me a smile !  
It eased a' the troubles o' harvest,  
An' softened the hardships o' toil.

*Oh, could I &c.*

Her hair, how I twisted an' braided,

An' folded in ringlets sae sweet !  
I pu'd her a posie o' gowans,  
An' laid them in bobs at her feet.

*Her hair, &c.*



I pu'd her the pinkies and roses,  
 For roses aye pleased her e'e;  
 And aye as she leugh at my kindness:  
 Nae lad was sae happy as me.  
*I pu'd her &c.*

Oft times when I teased her an' vex'd her,  
 She lifted a clod or a stane;  
 But aye she tuik tent how she cuist it:  
 Na, she wadna hae broken a bane.  
*Oft times &c.*

And sae kindly she flate when I kissed her,  
 An' ca'd me a haveril tyke:  
 Bnt now she's tane on wi' anither,  
 An' I may gae court where I like,  
*And sae kindly &c.*

Some few years afterwards, she, who thus rejected the interest which Robert Beighet took in her welfare, removed to the northern borders of Yorkshire; and he, having cause to be in that neighbourhood, made it his business to pay her a visit. She received him kindly, and he remained till the following morning. Before his departure she carefully dressed his hair, and, according to the prevailing fashion, bound it behind with a new riband. This little mark of kindness, even though all sweethearting between the parties had ceased, was to him extremely gratifying: he remembered it with pleasure to his dying day.

While this subject is before us, we may observe that, subsequently, he formed another attachment to a most deserving young woman, and in this he was happily successful. Much may, however, fall between *the cup and the lip*; and previous to the period when marriage between them was about to be celebrated, the intended bride grew sick and died. To Robert this proved a most severe blow; and if, thereupon, he registered a vow in Heaven never to marry, he kept it—continuing through life a single man.

When the majority of people arrive at a certain age, they dislike to be under the necessity of ever changing their places of residence; and Robert, from this feeling, resolved to pursue, altogether, the profession of a fuller and dyer. He accordingly, with a near relation, removed from Otterburne, and entered on the premises of the Walk Mill at Holystone in Coquetdale. At this place he remained for some years; but probably from the cause that better encouragement was offered him in another quarter, he returned to



Redesdale—to the stream that laved the haunts of his early days, and was employed for a considerable time at Woodburn. No particular account of his manner of life here, has reached us; but we may be assured that in the vicinity, and especially amongst those who, at an unemployed half-hour, had no dislike to a glass of ale, his company would be much sought after. His conciliating disposition, and friendly warmth gave his manners a polish which rendered him a favourite wherever he was known.

Towards his latter days, he again drew back amongst strange faces to the spot of his birth, and earned the means of subsistence under the same roof which sheltered the declining years of his parents. The place was dear to him from a long train of venerable associations. An attachment of this kind, in whatever light it may be regarded by unthinking men, exists strongest in noble natures, and will be found generally accompanying such amiable and endearing qualities as are deserving of the greatest praise in domestic life. He lodged in the village of Otterburne, and when the toil of the day was over, it became customary with him to step into the house of Mr. James Thompson, a very remarkable man, in whose company and that of Mr. James Lunn, all popular topics were talked over. As long as he was able to move about, this was always to him a place of resort; and well might it be so:—Thompson's knowledge of the world, and comprehensive acquaintance with art, science, and politics—Lunn's extensive recollection of what he witnessed abroad while he was serving his country, united to the good taste he manifested on all subjects of a literary nature—and Beighet's fund of anecdote enlivened by his own shrewd remarks on “men, their manners and their ways” formed altogether a species of attraction which the writer of this notice still remembers with delight; and which, after a lapse of nearly twenty years, seems like a green spot amidst the sterile waste of life—a refreshing brook from which the traveller reluctantly departs to pursue his way under a sultry sun, amid scorching plains and burning sands.

About the beginning of the year 1826, under a complication of ailments, the constitution of Beighet began to give way. At his advanced age slight hope could be entertained of his recovery: his maladies increased with the advance of spring, and he grew still worse as the flowers and the grass came forth fresh and luxuriantly. To a young, susceptible heart, it is matter of great severity “to die in spring;” but those, who have had enough of the cares and buffetings of life, value it the less,—existence becoming to them, like the white of an egg, tasteless, and scarcely repaying any exertion they may undergo for its preservation. More than this, the mind becomes shaken, similar to the frame, before dissolution: it loses its keen

perceptive power, and involuntarily stoops to the stroke that is awaiting it. Such was the case with him who forms the principal subject of these desultory observations: he died, and was buried at Elsdon, on the 24th of May, 1826, aged 69 years.

Robert Beighet was of middle stature, and, in his early years, was considered handsome; but as age advanced upon him he was somewhat inclined to corpulency. Towards the latter part of his life, owing to a lameness in his feet and legs, he moved with difficulty, and generally appeared with a walking stick in each hand. On one cheek he had a large, darkish, natural spot; yet his countenance was manly, approaching to the square English mould, such as we see in the portraits of Milton, Cromwell and Clarendon. His look for the most part was turned downward, as if the mind within was enjoying itself in delightful contemplation, or drawing new inferences from its own accumulated stores. When, however, in discourse, a hint from you awakened within him some bright thought or striking view of the topic under consideration, he looked full upon you—his large and brilliant black eyes sparkling through the glasses which he usually wore, and delivered his opinion in language which would have done honour to a consummate orator. His fine musical ear enabled him to whistle a tune with admirable effect; and those who have heard him *diddle* “Dainty Davie” may well remember it, as they will never again have the chance of hearing that merry measure awakened into such living and spirited harmony. He was unrivalled in his graphic manner of relating a droll story or humorous anecdote, and when any subject of a jocular kind came to be handled before him, he relished it so mightily that Thomas Carlyle himself would have loved him for the heartiness of his laugh. In his remarks and sallies of wit, to his honour be it said, he preserved such respectful delicacy to the individual feelings of those with whom he associated that he seldom or never made a single enemy—indeed his intellect rarely flashed over, or scorched the objects against which it was directed, but, by its playful scintillations, tended rather to illuminate and amuse than consume. When we add that he was more ready to listen than to speak; and that if the discourse flagged, he had the power of quickening it wonderfully, by a word in season, we have put the reader in possession of nearly all we remember of Robert Beighet—a MAN whose failings, such as they were, fell heaviest on himself; and whose redeeming virtues were worthy of a wider sphere than that to which Fortune limited their owner.